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CHRISTIAN GOBRECHT, ARTIST AND INVENTOR.

BY CHARLES GOBRECHT DARRACH.

- (probable) grand

John Christopher Gobrecht, the father of the subject of this sketch, a clergyman of the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania, was born in Angerstein, Germany, October 11, 1733, and emigrated to Philadelphia in 1755. Between the years of 1766 and 1806, he was minister in charge of congregations in Lancaster, York and other counties. He died at the advanced age of 82 years. His wife was Elizabeth Sands, born in 1746, whose great-great-grandfather James Sands was born in England in 1622, landed at Plymouth, Mass., in 1642, and was one of the early settlers of Block Island, where he died in 1695. The Rev. John Christopher and Elizabeth Gobrecht had ten children, of whom Christopher was the seventh.

Christian Gobrecht was born in Hanover, Penna., December 23, 1785. At an early age he developed an originality and taste for art. There are among the collections of the Historical Society, a drawing-book, dated 1794, when he was ten years of age, in which are original sketches illustrating topics of the day, drawn with an accuracy of perception and strength of pencil remarkable in one so young, and also one dated 1802, showing more fully-developed talents.

Early in life he was apprenticed to a clock-maker in Manheim, Penna. He taught himself the art of engraving and dye-sinking. He subsequently established himself in Baltimore, Md., where he associated with William H. Freeman. He removed from Baltimore to Philadelphia in 1810 or 1811.

Previous to 1810, he invented a novel medal-ruling machine, in which the ruler was stationary, and the board upon which the plate to be ruled was placed, moved, and carried the plate. This medal-ruling machine was subsequently

perfected so as to rule waved lines, and in 1817 the first specimen of this art was exhibited in the head of Alexander of Russia.

The invention of this machine, which revolutionized the art and has been and is of inestimable value, had many claimants, both in this country and in Europe. A controversy of nearly thirty years, from 1816 to 1843, has left, even up to the present time, the original inventor's name in doubt, notwithstanding the disavowal of the principal claimant, who made no claims until after 1830, although the firm of which he was a member had a machine, made under the directions of Mr. Gobrecht, and for which they paid him a royalty. In 1816, Mr. Gobrecht was employed by Messrs. Murray, Draper, Fairman & Co., Banknote Engravers of Philadelphia, and the medal-ruling machine invented by him was in use by that firm, Alva Mason, Mr. Freeman, Mr. Spencer, Col. C. G. Childs, and Rawdon, Clark & Co., of Albany, between the years of 1817 and 1825.

Among Mr. Gobrecht's earliest portrait plates is that of George Washington for "D. Kingston's New American Biographical Dictionary," published in Baltimore in 1810. Other examples of his work are engravings of—

Portraits of Dr. B. S. Barton, published in The Port Folio;
Rev. Thomas Baldwin;
Benjamin Franklin (for Delaplaine's Repository);
Rev. Andrew Fuller;
Abraham Rees (frontispiece to Rees's Encyclopædia);
David Rittenhouse (for Delaplaine);
Benjamin Rush (for Delaplaine).

Sometime between the years 1816 and 1821, Mr. Gobrecht invented and manufactured a reed organ, made of an assemblage of metallic tongues placed in a case and operated with a bellows and keys. The first instrument was disposed of to a gentleman in Lancaster, Penna., and subsequently another instrument was made in 1832, which is in possession of the writer's family. This reed organ seems to be

the first example of what is the now common cabinet organ, and it is interesting to know that it preceded the invention of the accordion.

In 1832, Mr. Gobrecht made application to President Monroe for the position of engraver and die-sinker to the United States Mint in Philadelphia, and in 1836 received an appointment as assistant to William Kneas. During the latter year, he designed what is known as the "Gobrecht dollar," the original design showing the well-known sitting Goddess of Liberty on the obverse, with a flying eagle on the reverse side. The design on the obverse was adopted for all of the silver currency, and was used on the dollar until 1831, when it was demonetized, and on the minor coin until 1891. The flying eagle, originally designed for the silver dollar, was subsequently used on the nickel penny.

As a die-sinker, Mr. Gobrecht was unexcelled, and among the best examples of his handiwork, may be noted the Award Medal of the Franklin Institute, executed in 1825; the Carroll Medal, the Charles Willson Peale Medal (admission to Peale's Museum); the seal of St. Peter's Church, Philadelphia; the Award Medal of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics' Society; the seal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind (portrait of John Milton); the Award Medal of the New England Society for the Promotion of Manufactures and the Mechanic Arts, the first award of which was made to Mr. Gobrecht for "the genius, taste and skill which he has evinced in executing the dies therefor."

Mr. Gobrecht was the twenty-fifth member of the Franklin Institute to affix his signature to the Charter and By-Laws of the Institution. He was a member of its Board of Management from Jan. 1828 to Dec. 1830, and member of the Committee on Science and Arts from 1834 until his death.

At the death of William Kneas, Mr. Gobrecht was appointed Engraver of the Mint of the United States at Philadelphia by President Martin Van Buren, which position he held until his death on July 23, 1844.

Christian Gobrecht married, May 31, 1818, Mary Hewes,

widow of Daniel Hewes, and the daughter of Thomas Hamilton and Rebecca Leaming. Their children were Christianna Elizabeth, Rebecca Mary, Charles Joseph, and William Henry. Christiana Elizabeth married Dr. William Darrach. Rebecca and Charles both died unmarried. William Henry studied medicine and became a noted surgeon, author and artist, who served during the War of the Rebellion as Brigade Surgeon for Gen. Hancock, and was Professor of Anatomy and Surgery in the Cincinnati College of Medicine.